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GOALS IN EDUCATING THE RETARDED CHILD

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INTRODUCTION

This afternoon I would like to discuss with you the nature and extent of the problem of mental retardation as viewed through the eyes of a special educator.

I will use the term mental retardation as an all inclusive one, referring to the three groups of mentally retarded children and youth who fall under the school's responsibilities: the trainable, the educable, and the slow learners.

These three groups of mentally retarded individuals are currently described by special educators as follows:

1. The trainable retarded are not considered to be educable in the sense that they can learn academic skills to any degree of competency. They are usually identified between birth and the fifth year of life. During this period of their lives they have poor motor development and their speech and socialization ability are minimal. They are not always ready to profit from group activities, but during their school-age years (6-21), given continuous and planned stimulation in a group, they might learn to communicate, can be trained in elemental health habits, can profit from systematic habit training, but cannot master academic skills. In adult life, they can contribute partially to self-support, under supervision and can develop some self-protection skills in a controlled or sheltered environment.

2. The educable retarded are those individuals who deviate from their so-called "normal" peers to the extent that it is difficult for them to be adequately educated through teaching provisions offered for the "normals." They are educable in the sense that they can acquire sufficient knowledge and ability in the academic areas for these skills to become useful tools. They are usually not identified between birth and the fifth year of life. During this period of their lives, they learn to communicate, although sometimes poorly. They have poor social awareness and fair motor development. They may profit from some training in self-help, communication and socialization in a group situation. During the school-age years, they can learn functional academic skills if given special education. As adults, they may be capable of self-maintenance in unskilled occupations, but need supervision and guidance to various degrees throughout their lives.

3. The slow learners are essentially at the lower fringes of the normal individuals. They have difficulties in keeping up with their normal peers mainly in academic subjects. They are probably not identifiable until the age of eight or nine. They will require remedial instruction and proper guidance and counseling, especially at the secondary school level. As adults, they will be capable of social and vocational adequacy with proper preparation.

The unique quality of American education is ascribed to the evolvement of schools which are committed to help all children and youth to raise their physical, mental, social and emotional level of functioning in a democratic society.

This commitment has its origin in our religious, philosophical, ethical and social heritage, which places the highest value on every human being, regardless of his age, sex, race, creed, cultural background, social status, capacities, knowledge, physical abilities, mental abilities, or state of his emotional adjustment. Included in our heritage is also the inalienable right

of every human being to strive for those conditions of living, learning and action, for those relationships with other human beings, and for those experiences which are necessary and appropriate to the achievement of his optimum development as a person and to his optimum usefulness within society.

Among these valuable human beings there are in the US over 5,000,000 individuals who deviate from those who are considered "mentally normal" in our society to such extent that they need specially adapted educational provisions to develop their physical, mental, social and emotional abilities.

The growing recognition that the mentally retarded child is an individual with potentialities that deserve to be developed to the fullest extent was stimulated by at least three powerful "explosions," to use our atomic age lingo:

- a. Explosion of population
- b. Explosion of knowledge
- c. Explosion of tempers.

All these "explosions" have resulted in more effective educational provisions for mentally retarded children and youth. The number of children in special public school classes grew from about 23,000 in 1922 to about 214,000 in 1958.

In my presentation I would like to confine myself to six interrelated dimensions of problems in the education of mentally retarded children and youth:

1. Operational definitions
2. Educational diagnoses
3. Educational needs of the mentally retarded
4. Instruction
5. The teacher
6. The family.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

There seems to be a complete lack of an operational definition of mental retardation which would help the educators in developing educational diagnosis, educational placement, educational evaluations, educational prognosis of an individual, as well as in deciding on goals, methodology, and other aspects of curricula for these children.

Mental retardation is a term that is often ambiguous in meaning, frustrating, semantically inadequate and at times its use is actually incorrect.

Just what is mental retardation? Who are the mentally retarded? It depends on who defines them and for what purpose.

You may recall the story of the three baseball umpires who were discussing their modes of operation and defending their integrity as umpires. "I call 'em as I see 'em" said the first. The second replied, "I call 'em as they are." I am afraid that the third umpire represents also the result of our approach to the mentally retarded. "What we call 'em makes 'em what they are".

We came to assume that because of the nature of their disabilities and handicaps, mentally retarded children needed a special program in a special class. We came to believe that if retarded children are to develop their limited potentialities, they should not be subjected to the more rapid pace of the regular classroom. We also came to assume that if the normal pupils are to progress at their optimum rates, the teacher should not be handicapped by having to make provisions for such slow pupils. In this way special classes for the retarded have been based from the beginning on a "relief" philosophy - relieving the normal child from the "dragging anchor" effect of the retarded child; relieving the teacher of her most discouraging teaching and behavior problems. But what have we done for the retarded child? According to Blackman, "we have placed the retarded child in an educational environment which immediately assumes the inexorable fact of his mental retardation - past, present, and future." The methods used in most of the special classes are geared toward the assumed low-level ability of the child. Research until very recently neglected to evaluate the possibility of accelerating the intellectual development of retarded children through specific training. Recent studies by Illinois University, Syracuse University, and Teachers College, Columbia University, indicate that intellectual development of retarded children is not as static as formerly believed. The pessimism regarding changes, especially with young children, is gradually disappearing.

The neglect to evaluate the efficacy of systematic efforts at expanding the intellectual capacity of the mentally retarded can be traced to at least three sources, which, unfortunately, still prevail among many educators:

1. Findings of studies, such as those on the Kallikak and Juke families and others, which were interpreted as evidence that mental retardation is inherited, therefore unalterable through education. As a result, effort was directed toward social control of the mentally retarded and toward prevention of this condition through segregation of the retardates in institutions and through sterilization.

2. The belief in constancy of the I.Q. "Once 50 - always 50."

3. Definitions of mental retardation which include the criterion of "incurability" which almost precluded the possibility of improving the ability of these individuals by training and education. In other words - if a child is mentally retarded, significant improvement is impossible. If a teacher or a

researcher, however, reports improvement, the explanation is then that the child was obviously not mentally retarded to begin with.

EDUCATIONAL DIAGNOSES

Various disciplines may view the mentally retarded from different angles, depending on their particular interest. Medical people might be more interested in looking at mental retardation from an etiological standpoint; they might use classifications which attempt to attribute the condition to a variety of causes, such as: infections, metabolic disorders, psychiatric disorders, sensory dysfunctions, etc.

The psychologist might be interested in classification based on the behavior of the individual, his ability to learn, or simply on his measured intelligence. The vocational rehabilitation counselor might classify his clients into: directly placeable, deferred placeable, sheltered employable, or non-self supporting.

The educator's main interest is in the degree of educability of an individual or in determining whether the individual is manageable or not manageable in a classroom situation. Thus, as mentioned earlier, an educational classification was introduced describing the three major groups of retarded children and youth: the trainable, the educable, and the slow learner. I would like to emphasize that these are educational terms and the special classroom teacher should be the key person on the evaluative team to make such a diagnosis. This diagnosis may or may not coincide with medical, psychological or other diagnoses. For example, not all mongoloids are automatically trainable and not all children with the IQ range of 50-75 should be automatically considered educable. The child with a medical diagnosis of blindness, deafness or cerebral palsy may be educationally gifted, normal, a slow learner, educable, trainable, or non-trainable. The various degrees of retardation (trainable, educable, slow learners) as viewed by the educator are measured according to the cognitive, sensorimotor and effective functioning of an individual of school age in a school set-up. Thus it is rather a misdiagnosis when one refers to a two year old child as educable mentally retarded, or to a twenty-five year old adult as trainable.

Our schools are becoming more skillful at identifying children with learning difficulties. Tests have improved, and, in general, more effective use is being made of test results. It is widely accepted that an IQ should not be an absolute and final label, since the score is apt to vary with the test and the age and condition of the child. Further, educators are asking pertinent questions: Do we measure enough variables? Are our measures broad enough to gauge abilities of the mentally retarded? To gauge educability?

One of the most fundamental beliefs in American democracy is that the good society results when each individual is given the opportunity to develop with the aid of a universally supported school system. Thus the public school holds as its main objective the provision of education for all children. The obligation of the public school is to accept all who fall within a certain age range, to provide an environment that is friendly to all, and to offer experiences which will be useful to each. One of the main functions of Special

Education is to see that this objective is implemented. Special educators resist decisions to reject individuals with disabilities and handicaps, and are busy developing resources within the schools to deal with those individuals who might so easily be rejected and who, in the past, often were rejected.

Special Education development emphasized the responsibility of schools to allocate children to programs likely to be best for them. Traditionally, the only criterion for a placement in a given program was the paramount handicap of a child. It could be physical disability, such as deafness, blindness, a crippling condition, impaired heart, etc. Another criterion could be the IQ of an individual. Thus those with IQ's below 50 were placed in one program; those with IQ's between 50 and 75 - in another program, and those above 75 found themselves in regular school classes. Many school systems consider "emotional disturbance" or "delinquency" as the only variable for creating a special class. Some schools opened special classes for the so-called "brain-injured". The paradox of this arrangement is that a discipline such as Special Education, which has as its principal aim provisions for individual differences among school children, should mistakenly assume that all children with deafness, blindness, IQ 50, or other handicap, are the same and need the same educational programs. The result is that in special classes are found children who vary greatly in their abilities, interests, and handicaps in every imaginable dimension.

Educators have only begun to realize this, and are searching for better methods of allocating children to appropriate special classes.

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF THE MENTALLY RETARDED

One of the major objectives of special education should be to help the mentally retarded individual develop mechanisms through which he will satisfy his basic psychological, biological, sociological, educational, vocational and recreational needs in ways accepted and approved by the society in which he lives. All these needs intermix so that it becomes impossible to meet adequately the individual's educational needs and ignore his psychological, biological, or sociological needs.

In the broad sense of the word, education refers to all those experiences which an individual encounters that affect in any way his development and by which he acquires the ways, beliefs, and standards of society.

Educational needs, for the purpose of this discussion, can be defined as the lack of some attitudes, knowledges, skills and information that it can be assumed the individual should have, or that is enjoyed by most members of society. This lack is experienced or felt within the organism and leads somehow to energizing and directing activity toward what is perceived as satisfying the need.

This definition implies the two types of educational needs mentioned by Stratemeyer et al 1) felt needs or expressed needs - referring to those needs which the learner himself is conscious, or to his request for help in solving problems or meeting situations, and 2) societal needs - referring to those attitudes, knowledges and skills that society demands of its citizens, whether or not the learner is aware of these demands.

Ideally, the special class should develop educational objectives for its students which take into consideration the basic needs of the individual and those of society. However, in practice one notices two diametrically opposed approaches:

1) the society-centered position and 2) the child-centered position. Advocates of the former hold that the objectives of special education are primarily social. According to them, the purpose of the school is to prepare the individual to live in a certain kind of society. It is, therefore, important that the individual become the kind of person desired by that society and that he acquire the outlooks, knowledges and skills demanded by it.

On the other hand, proponents of the child-centered approach argue that the ultimate purpose of special education is the development of an individual. In other words, it is preparing the individual to achieve maximum social and economic success. The advocates of this position also hold that education, in both purpose and content, must be based on individual needs, capacities and interests.

According to Doll, it has become popular to declare that the educational needs of the exceptional child and his educational management are essentially the same as those for normal children. "This is true" - he states - "if emphasis is on the essential, because the special child is essentially a child. But his identification as special is based on his deviant attributes and needs."

The paramount educational need of a mentally retarded child is what Doll calls "adulthood".

He defines adulthood as "the process of becoming, or assisting someone to become, an adult, and by implication a mature, competent person who will be relatively self-sufficient and a contributing member of his family and his social community."

INSTRUCTION

Curriculum is usually defined as the total school program. This definition includes physical facilities, learning activities, interaction of learners and teachers, learners and learners, etc. Curriculum development for the mentally retarded is regarded as the systematic effort of individuals and groups to help children, adolescents, and adults with mental, physical, emotional, and social dysfunctions to improve the level of their current mental, physical, emotional and social functioning in our society. It is a continuous process which takes into consideration:

1. The nature of our society
2. The nature of the learner
3. Educational methods
4. Research findings

Ideally, curriculum development workers should consist of teachers and school administrators, psychologists, social workers, physicians, vocational counselors, parents, civic and church leaders, occupational, physical therapists among others. By helping the individual to improve his physical, mental, emotional and social

level of functioning, we are helping him to occupy a contributing place in the society in which he lives. This means he will be an individual:

- a) who understands his own strengths and limitations - self realization
- b) who can play, work, and live with others - human relationship
- c) who can contribute his share of work and responsibility to the social group in which he lives - economic efficiency
- d) who is able to act as a responsible citizen of the social group in which he lives - civic responsibility

The immediate objectives of our program are the improvement of physical, mental, emotional, and social functioning of an individual in his day to day operation in our society. Thus, curriculum is the way to achieve these objectives and ultimate goals, and will vary in different age groups and in different educational classifications.

Preschool age might be considered a diagnostic period. There is very little division between the trainable and educable. Curriculum for both groups consists mainly of self-help, communication skills, and socialization activities. For the teacher this period of time is the best opportunity to discover the various functions and dysfunctions of individuals as well as the rate of their learning. Concrete materials which stimulate and motivate the child should be used. Optimum opportunities should be provided for the child to explore, for self expression and for stimulating spontaneous language. Careful anecdotal records kept by the teacher will help to discover trends in functioning and dysfunctioning of the child. The teacher should have an opportunity to contribute his observation to physicians, psychologists, social workers, and others, who in turn should share their evaluations and assessments of the child and his environment. If this is done in the preschool period, then the teacher, with the help of the rest of the team, could predict the trainability or educability of the child and place him on the proper track.

During school age, the curriculum for trainable children consists of activities revolving around self-help, communication, and socialization. The curriculum for the educable involves a gradual increase of skills in concrete as well as abstract areas, but all based on real life situations and realistic preparation.

The post-school age trainable may be directly placeable in a sheltered workshop. Some will be placeable after additional training while some will never become placeable at all. The educable may be directly placeable in sheltered workshops and some might be non-placeable.

Let me summarize the current thinking about the education of mentally retarded children by quoting a statement made by the faculty of the Department of Special Education of Teachers College, Columbia University, regarding our philosophy of special education.

"For us, special education has as its primary function instruction for children and youth who are exceptional . . . Special education assumes responsibility for selective educational content, methodology and materials. Within this general framework special education is:

Enrichment, providing experiences for child expression and a foundation for their forging ahead.

Developmental, starting at the point of child function, however unadjusted or unusual the level.

"Evaluative, seeking learning barriers and identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses.

Preventive--of repeated failure, boredom, time-wasting, and wherever possible, of secondary handicaps.

Remedial, deleting blocks, reconstructing patterns of learning and communication, re-enforcing new learning and compensating for educational gaps.

Experimental, cutting new pathways in educational theory and practice.

Preparatory, for further education, optimum vocational placement and as creative living as possible.

Individualized, in approaching content, guidance and programming from which each child can benefit.

Consultative, offering assistance to regular classroom teachers responsible for exceptional children or children with educational problems.

"Many of these ingredients are present in the work of other professional personnel. But, special education is instructional in nature. The special educator's focus is on providing the exceptional child or adult in an educational program with ample opportunity for developing appropriate modes of behavior, mental and physical aptitudes, and self-realization."

THE TEACHER

We usually say that a teacher of the retarded should be a well trained person. What constitutes a well trained teacher for the mentally retarded is a matter of opinion, and opinions, as you well know, vary widely on this subject. To me the successful teacher is one who has the capacity for reaching students as individuals. The architect, the lawyer, the MD usually serves his client or patient by doing something to him or for him; the teacher, when he performs his work best, does it with his student. I believe that the teacher is a practitioner, an artist, an engineer who strives to help children learn. If he is to work effectively with children whose intelligence levels differ markedly from his own, the teacher must know something of the ways in which children mature, how they learn, what motivates them, and how physical, emotional and social factors influence learning and teaching. The teacher must know as much as possible about the nature of learning, the ways of motivating students, and teaching techniques suitable for them. Just as a civil, chemical, or electrical engineer who is concerned with building bridges, streets and machines, must base his procedures on mathematics and basic sciences of physics and chemistry, so a teacher should direct his methods and procedures according to principles and laws that are psychologically sound. We make a distinction between an engineer and a mechanic. A mechanic may be only a tinkerer who tunes up engines by rule of thumb methods, without understanding the basic principles of the gasoline engine. An engineer, on the other hand, having studied the sciences basic to his art, is able to meet new situations and to adapt his materials to them.

"A part of every successful teacher's performance is explainable only in terms of his own experience, his own sensitivity, his own imagination. To what extent such artistry is learned or how, or where - is a mystery as elusive as the origin of any other talent."

The teacher does not do his job alone. He is complemented by teacher educators, supervisors and administrators who, we assume, understand the intricate and interwinding elements of special education. He needs aids from the various disciplines concerned - persons whom he can refer pupils and by whom he will be challenged by "give and take" discussion to promote professional perspective in his efforts to help children grow.

THE FAMILY

The mentally retarded individual should be viewed in terms of the environment and atmosphere provided him by his immediate social group - his family. I believe that educational provisions for the mentally retarded should start to consider this point of view more seriously. The retarded child is an integral part of the nuclear family, or the primary family unit, composed of a married couple and their offspring. The nuclear family is a unity of inter-acting personalities. The clustered relationships among these personalities are at least eight in number: husband-wife; father-son; father-daughter; mother-son; mother-daughter; brother-brother; sister-sister; brother-sister.

It can be hypothesized that the mentally retarded child in the midst of this primary family unit, because of his multiple handicaps, impairs the development of healthy relationships among the members of this unit and inevitably the whole family unit becomes handicapped. The handicaps of the family unit may lie in the same areas as those of the child, i.e., communication, self-concept, etc. Any educational treatment given only to the child does not necessarily remedy the family's handicap. Here I see the most neglected problem in school programming for the retarded.

CONCLUSION

In my presentation I have attempted to delineate some of the problems in educating mentally retarded children and youth.

Let me close with a quotation from the recent Report to the President by the President's Panel on Mental Retardation:

" . . . a large majority of retarded children are still not provided with educational opportunities commensurate with their needs. It is the obligation of public and private education to provide appropriate educational opportunities for all mentally retarded children who can profit from education and training. There can no longer be doubt as to the need for, and desirability of, special classes for education of the mentally retarded.

"If all retarded children are to receive adequate educational services, local communities and States must greatly extend specialized educational training in regular schools and in special schools, substantially increase the supply of teachers with specialized training, and more effectively coordinate the total resources of the community. Major deterrents to the realization of this objective are (1) the limited financial resources of most States and communities for support of costly specialized school services, and (2) the lack of sufficient numbers of teachers qualified to render the necessary specialized services. The needs are formidable because the total number of handicapped children, including the mentally retarded, is about 5 million. The expansion of special education programs will require leadership and financial assistance of the Federal Government and other national groups interested in education."

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